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Officials Think Spying Led to Death of C.I.A. Informant in Ghana

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WASHINGTON, July 12 — Reagan Administration officials said today that they believed at least one Central Intelligence Agency informant in Ghana was murdered after his identity was disclosed by an agency employee charged with espionage.

The officials, who asked not to be identified, said there were fears in the intelligence community that reprisals would be taken against several other Ghanaians who assisted C.I.A. covert operations in the country.

Sharon M. Scranage, a employee of the agency for seven years, was arrested Thursday and charged with giving extensive information about the agency's operations in Ghana to representatives of the country's Government while she worked there as clerk.

The authorities said Miss Scranage turned over sensitive documents and the names of virtually everyone working for the C.I.A. in the country to a Ghanaian with whom she had developed a close personal relationship. Administration officials described the pair as "lovers."

"There were some serious consequences," said one official. "They had somebody caught and we believe it's likely they died as a result of this."

Michael Agbotui Soussoudis, identified by a Federal complaint as her contact in Ghana, was arrested Wednesday and charged with espionage. He is a relative of Ghana's leader, Flight Lieutenant Jerry J. Rawlings.

Mr. Rawlings, who came to power in a coup in 1981, has been recently seeking a rapprochement with the West. The State Department issued a statement today which said relations with Ghana were good and added, "We assume they will continue to be." The Department took issue with some news reports it said characterized Ghana as a Marxist state. Reports linking its foreign policy to the Soviet Union or Libya were "quite inaccurate," the State Department said.

Senator Questions Security

Meanwhile, Senator Patrick J. Leahy, the Vermont Democrat who is vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said the case raised serious questions about the security precautions taken by the C.I.A. He said he was particularly disturbed that the agency had not investigated the relationship between Miss Scranage and Mr. Soussoudis.

According to the complaint filed in Federal court here, Miss Scranage passed documents and information to Mr. Soussoudis on a number of occasions over 18 months. Some of these meetings took place "at her residence," the complaint said.

"They should have been more concerned about this type of relationship going on," said Mr. Leahy. "I have been saying for years that our people in the military, the C.I.A. and the State Department are just not security conscious."

Pressure on Rawlings Seen

The prosecution of Miss Scranage and Mr. Soussoudis was begun even though officials knew it would expose C.I.A. activities in Ghana and could harm relations with the country, an intelligence official said.

Zaki Ergas, a professor in the African Studies Program at Georgetown University, said that the disclosures about the C.I.A. activity in Ghana

would increase the pressure on Mr. Rawlings to punish those linked to the C.I.A.

"Rawlings cannot appear to be soft on the C.I.A.," said Mr. Ergas. "Given the nationalist winds blowing through the Third World, it would be very damaging if he was thought to be too cozy with the United States."

After her service in her West African post, Miss Scranage was posted to C.I.A. headquarter in Washington. Authorities said Ghanaian officials had asked her to search the agency's central files.

According to the Federal complaint, Miss Scranage admitted in two days of questioning by F.B.I. agents that she had given Mr. Soussoudis the names of Ghanaian dissidents working for the agency, as well as communications data and an intelligence report about military equipment a Ghanaian group had requested from Libya.

The complaint said the Ghanaians cooperating with the C.I.A. had given American intelligence operatives information deemed secret by the Government of Ghana.

'A Nice Young Lady'

Miss Scranage, 29 years old, was described today by relatives as a church-going woman and a model student.

"She was just a nice young lady, a girl growing up," said Pansy Bumbrey, an aunt who lives in Miss Scranage's hometown of King George, Virginia. Mrs. Bumbrey said Miss Scranage was an honor student and leader of her high school cheerleading squad. After graduating from King George High School in 1974, Miss Scranage spent two years at a business school in Roanoke, Virginia, where she earned an associate degree.

Mrs. Bumbrey said she learned of her niece's arrest from television news reports. "I was shocked," she said. "I don't know why they keep saying 'lover, lover.' She was not that type of person. She was a respected girl — her whole family is. Anybody in the county can tell you that."